DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 441 597 PS 028 605

AUTHOR Dockett, Sue; Perry, Bob
TITLE Starting School: What Matters for Children, Parents, and Educators?
INSTITUTION Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc., Watson.
SPONS AGENCY Western Sydney Univ., Macarthur (Australia).; New South Wales Dept. of Training and Education Co-ordination, Darlinghurst (Australia).
ISBN ISBN-1-875890-40-8
ISSN ISSN-1440-5148
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 25p.; Theme issue. Published quarterly.
AVAILABLE FROM Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc., P.O. Box 105, Watson, ACT 2602, Australia ($9.95 Australian dollars). Tel: 02-6241-6900; Fax: 02-6241-5547; e-mail: national@aeca.org.au; Web site: http://www.aeca.org.au.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
JOURNAL CIT AECA Research in Practice Series; v6 n3 1999
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Childhood Attitudes; Educational Practices; Foreign Countries; Parent Attitudes; *Primary Education; Program Effectiveness; School Entrance Age; *School Readiness; *Student Adjustment; Teacher Attitudes; *Transitional Programs; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS Australia; Beginning of School Year; Program Characteristics; *Transitional Activities

ABSTRACT

Starting school is a transition marked by excitement, trepidation, happiness, or sadness for all involved. This issue of the Australian Early Childhood Association Research in Practice Series discusses some of the issues described as important by children, parents, and preschool and elementary educators in an interview study of children's transition to school in Australia. Section 1 of the booklet presents children's views about starting school, focusing on their disposition toward school, expected differences from prior-to-school settings, the importance of friends, learning school rules, and the help children want from adults. Section 2 of the booklet presents parents' views about their children starting school, focusing on their child's social adjustment, their child's disposition or attitude toward school, anticipated physical demands of attending school, family issues, and concern about the educational environment their child will encounter. Section 3 of the booklet highlights educators' viewpoints, focusing on social adjustment issues, the importance of skill development, children's disposition toward school, the role of chronological age in starting school, their preference that children be over 5 years old when starting, and the importance of children learning to work independently at school. The booklet notes the importance of listening to the perspectives of all participants and lists characteristics of effective transition programs. A summary table of the issues raised in the booklet presents implications for practice in planning and managing young children's transition to school. (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

Starting School

ED 441 597

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

What matters for children, parents, and educators?

PS 028605

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. deSilva

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

By Sue Dockett & Bob Perry

AECA

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Invitation to Authors

The AECA Research in Practice Series is published four times each year by the Australian Early Childhood Association.

The series aims to provide practical, easy to read, up-to-date information and support to a growing national readership of early childhood workers. The books bring together the best information available on wide ranging topics and are an ideal resource for children's services workers and others interested in the care and education of young children. Books produced in previous years have now become standard texts in many early childhood courses.

The AECA Publications Committee invites contributions on all aspects of the education and care of young children. Given the multi-disciplinary nature of the field, contributions from all disciplines concerned with young children and their families are welcome.

All Research in Practice Series manuscripts are required to undergo a blind review by readers experienced in the field and will not necessarily be published. The style of the Research in Practice books must be simple and informative. Jargon and the presumption of prior knowledge should be avoided. Guidelines for contributors are available on request from the Publications Section.

Publications Manager

Publications Officer

Publications Administrator

1999 Subscriptions

Overseas Subscriptions Available

Bulk Purchases

Change of Address

Advertising Rates

Photos: Barry Brown, Alison Elliott, Rhonda Milner

Illustrations: Alison Munro

Copyright 1999

ISSN 1440-5718

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Starting School

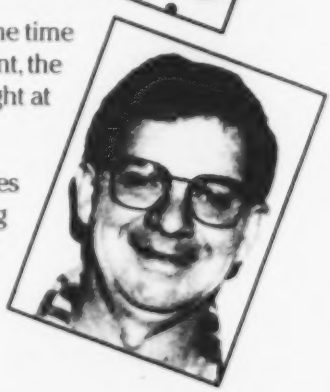
CONTENTS

What do children say about starting school?	2
What do parents say about starting school?	5
What do educators say about starting school?	9
Listening to children, parents & teachers	12
What matters to children, parents, & educators, & implications for practice	14
References & suggested reading	18

What matters for children, parents, and educators?

About the authors

Sue Dockett has worked in a range of early childhood settings, including the early years of school, long day care, and work-based child care. Sue is interested in young children's play, thinking, and learning. She has worked in early childhood teacher education at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur for the past 12 years.



Bob Perry has been involved in early childhood teacher education for some time and is particularly interested in young children's mathematical development, the nature of teacher beliefs and the influence of these on practice. He has taught at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur for the past 13 years.

The authors are the co-directors of the *Starting School* project which involves many groups of children, parents, early childhood educators, employing bodies, and academics in investigating the transition to school. Bob and Sue would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution from all concerned to the direction and implementation of the research.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Starting School

Introduction

Starting school is a time of excitement, trepidation, happiness, or sadness for all involved. Children, parents (this term is taken to include parents and guardians), and teachers may all be excited by the transition but, at the same time, many admit to feeling apprehensive. For many children, the excitement of going to *big school* is tinged with a sense of not knowing exactly what it will be like. For parents, there is the sense of letting go, and of their children growing up. For teachers, there is a sense of starting all over again, as they watch their former students move on and as they prepare to greet the new group of students.

The changes some children encounter as they go to school can be enormous. Some children will travel for considerable time on public or private transport, some will be among children they have never met before, some will move away from home, some will be expected to respond to a language they are barely familiar with, and still others will find themselves in a strange or unfamiliar social and cultural context. There is enormous potential for children to feel lost, alienated, or scared about such changes, but there is also the potential for children to feel valued, cared for, respected, excited, and enthusiastic about their school experience. Whatever the outcome, it is largely influenced by the nature of adult participation in the transition to school.

Children have much to contribute to the transition process. Generally, they are very aware of what is happening around them as they start school and keen to share this with others. Listening to children talk about what starting school is like for them, or to what they think it will be like, and responding to the issues they

What matters for children, parents, and educators?

Transitions are important times in the lives of all people. The transition to school is one of the first major transitions children make and the way it is managed sets the stage not only for children's success at school, but also their response to future transitions.

raise is one way in which adults can help to make the transition to school smooth and enjoyable.

The comments reported in this booklet are drawn from an extensive study of children's transition to school which has been conducted in NSW since 1997. In the course of this study, interviews were conducted with children as they started, or prepared to start, school, and with parents and educators in a range of early childhood settings. As well, questionnaires were distributed to schools, prior-to-school services and parents in a wide range of locations across the state (see Perry, Dockett & Howard, in press; Perry, Dockett and Tracey, 1998).

This booklet discusses some of the issues described as important by each group of participants in the transition to school—children, parents, and educators (in both prior-to-school and school settings). The information presented is not exhaustive. Rather, it is used to illustrate the issues that mattered for these people and which may be relevant to many others. One aim of using this information is to encourage all those to talk with the others and to consider the different perspectives and understandings they have. A summary table of the issues raised in the booklet is included in order to present some implications for practice in planning and managing young children's transition to school. Implications are listed for children, parents, and educators in the belief that all have an active and important role to play.

Children who have just started school usually have vivid recollections of what happened on their first day

What do children say about starting school?

Children who have just started school usually have vivid recollections of what happened on their first day. For many, there is a sense of unease as the familiar adult, usually the parent, leaves. Often, children are unsure of what will happen next:

> *My Mum and Dad came. They saw lots of pictures and talked to the teacher. They sit [sic] in the classroom for a while and talk to the teacher. Stay for a long time. I was sad [when they left] cause I wanted them to stay. The teacher told them to go. Cause they had been there a long time. I was sad because I didn't know what was gonna happen.*

The same concern about not knowing what was to happen is reflected in other children's comments about how they felt:

- *I cried—but not really. Some did, cause they didn't like it on their first day. Cause they didn't know what they had to do.*
- *I felt a bit scared, a bit scared that I wouldn't know where my stuff was.*
- *I cried because I was shy and didn't know my teacher's name.*

Disposition

Many children talk about school in a positive way, describing themselves as being *happy, excited, wanting to go to big school to find new friends* and expecting to *have fun at big school.* Where children expressed negative feelings, often this related to not knowing what was happening. As in the examples above, children expressed concern about knowing where their belongings were and who their teacher was. Unfamiliar environments can cause anxiety for most people, including children.

In addition to their own feelings, some children are aware of the feelings of others. One child illustrated this when she said her mother felt *sad cause I'm not there, happy cause I'll learn.* Another commented: *Mum and Dad felt excited. A bit sad but happy because I was going to big school. They couldn't believe I was going already.*

Unfamiliar environments can cause anxiety for most people, including children

Differences from prior-to-school settings

Children expect school to be different from prior-to-school settings. There is an element of growing up and getting bigger associated with going to school, and the experiences at school are expected, by children, to reflect this. One child commented she *wanted to come [to big school] so I wouldn't hear babies crying at preschool anymore,* and another that *I was really busting to go, I liked it because I wouldn't have to sleep.* Children expected to *play games and have fun and make new friends* when they started school. Some expected to do work as well as play and to do *homework every day.*

'Big school' can be a fascinating place, but it can also be rather daunting. One reason for this is the presence of older, bigger children. When describing some of the things they did not like, big kids featured for several children. One commented *School is really fun and I think I'm going to like it, but always when the big kids aren't around.* Another avoided the big kids in the playground because he *didn't like the big kids to hurt.*

Children seem to measure their success at school by whether or not they have friends

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Friends

Friends assume a great deal of importance as children start school. Children seem to measure their success at school by whether or not they have friends. Comments such as *I like school cause I like playing and finding some friends* and *big school is better than preschool cause can make up lots and lots of friends* highlight the importance of being among friends.

Preparing for school

Getting ready for school involves a range of things. One of the most important elements, according to the children, was getting to know the school rules. Children could recite a number of rules, as well as the consequences of breaking them. When asked what they should tell someone who was about to start school, these rules featured highly, for example:

- *You have to know to sit down or stand up if the teacher says.*

  You have to listen to the teacher.
- *Don't be naughty, don't pick flowers and don't pick someone else's lunch up.*
- *Don't be cheeky and don't pinch anybody.*

What do children want parents and teachers to do to help?

Children identified specific tasks such as:

- helping do names
- buy[ing] uniform
- tell kids that they are going to school
- find[ing] out where the office is.

Tasks for educators in prior-to-school settings included:

- signing something
- packing up your desk/locker
- teach you some letters
- teach you to say thank you

... while tasks for teachers in schools included:

- clean[ing] up the school
- mak[ing] some activities before we start school
- set[ting] the place up nice
- tell you what to bring in your lunch box.

Summary

Starting school can be an exciting and anxious experience for children, families, and teachers. Early childhood educators in school and prior-to-school settings can help make the transition positive if they listen to children, take their concerns seriously, and consider the experience from a child's perspective.

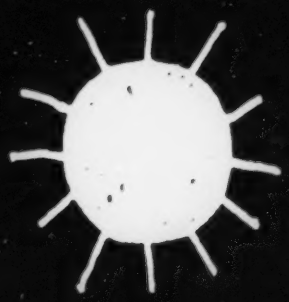
Educators … can help make the transition positive if they listen to children, take their concerns seriously, and consider the experience from a child's perspective

What do parents say about starting school?

Parents, in interviews and in their responses to the questionnaire, emphasised the importance of their children adjusting socially to the school setting and having a positive disposition about going to school. Social adjustment involved children being comfortable in a large group, responding appropriately to adults other than parents, and being able to interact appropriately with adults and children. The child's disposition, i.e. how they felt about going to school, affected many aspects of family life as well as the child's interactions at school. Parents were also concerned about children's physical attributes and how these related to the school context, as well as a range of issues which affected the family and influenced the educational environment provided for their children.

Social adjustment

For parents, social adjustment incorporated a level of interpersonal adjustment for children—being able to separate from them without being too upset, not crying, and having friends—as well as a level of organisational adjustment related to being a member of a large class group. Parents wanted their children to 'fit in' rather than stand out; to be regarded as competent, rather than contrary; and to be accepted by their peers and the teacher. Parents wanted their children to know *how to talk to teachers* and how to *ask for what they need* as well as *follow the directions* of the teacher. They wanted their children to be able to leave them for the whole day, and that they would have friends. There was also a level of concern from parents about their own social



Some parents described how *excited teachers* made school a fascinating place for children to be, and how this excitement promoted a positive disposition and eagerness among children to be a part of school experiences

adjustment, i.e. how they themselves would manage to separate from their child—especially on the first day—and how they would adjust to the child having other significant adults in their lives. Parents also hoped their child's teacher would make some adjustment to their child. This was expressed in comments such as *I hope the teacher likes her.*

Disposition

A child's positive attitude towards school was regarded by parents as a critical factor for successful transition. Parents acknowledged that, at different times, their children felt anxious, nervous, and sometimes worried about what school would be like—just as they themselves felt about how their child would settle into the school environment. More often, however, parents talked about their children being excited and happy to go to school—eager to join the *big kids; willing to have a go; keen to be there.* Parents also saw it as their responsibility that such positive dispositions be encouraged. Their own disposition—demonstrated in their willingness to be involved in school experiences and to help children find out about school—was also recognised as important by many parents, as was the disposition of the teachers.

Physical considerations

There are many physical issues to be considered when children start school. Parents tend to know their children well and are acutely aware of these issues. For example, parents recognise that wearing a uniform, especially shoes that cannot be taken off whenever children wish, is an unfamiliar experience for many children. So too is being at school for the entire day, five days a week, and not having a sleep during the day. As well, there are medical checks and immunisations to be completed. For children who live some distance from the school, there may be added travel, possibly by bus. For others, before and after school care adds to the length of their school day. For many young children, school days are long. The physical demands of school

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

on children can be considerable and can influence the nature of the transition experience.

Parents are conscious of the differences between schools and other settings—either home or prior-to-school—and are aware that some of the things they want for their children may not be available. For example, one parent expressed concern that her daughter would be too busy to remember to *keep her fluids up*, and another that the child would not have *access to soap* in order to wash effectively. Many parents noted that eating a packed lunch was unfamiliar for children, and knowing what and when to eat was difficult. Reports of hungry children eating all their food at recess were not uncommon.

For many parents, their child's move to school is an indication of growing independence and life outside the family context. Parents have commented on *how grown up their children look in their uniforms* and on the range of emotions they experience as their 'baby' becomes a school child. As they start school, it is easy to compare children physically with their peers—children will be small, tall, clumsy, confident; some will run into the school playground, others will drag their feet. Some children seem overpowered by the backpack they carry; others stride effortlessly off to the classroom. If these comparisons remind us that children vary considerably and that we need to cater for such diversity, they can be useful. However, such comparisons can be fraught with difficulty if we expect children to all be the same when they start school. For many parents, a child's age contributes to their growing confidence; for others, being a specific age was but one of the many considerations in determining the best time for them to start school.

The physical demands of school on children can be considerable and can influence the nature of the transition experience

Family issues

Just as children experience a range of physical pressures, so do families. Parents have the responsibility of ensuring that children get to school by a specific time each day, with everything they need, having completed homework or other tasks. Sometimes, parents felt just

The transition to school may require that the family organisation changes. It also means that parents may spend more time at school. For some parents, school is an unfamiliar environment that may not hold positive memories. Just stepping into this environment can be challenging for many parents, and this needs to be recognised by all concerned

getting out of the house on time was a major achievement.

Most parents voiced concerns for their children as they started school, e.g.

- *Will they cope?*
- *Will it be what they expect?*
- *Will they keep up with the others in their group?*
- *Will they enjoy school?*

Others expressed uncertainty as to their role in the school:

- *Can I go into the classroom?*
- *What will my role be?*
- *Will I be allowed to help?*
- *Will I be able to help them with their homework?*

These questions reflect a desire to be active participants in their children's education as well as some uncertainty as to how this might occur.

Educational environment

Have we made the right choice of school? What is the ethos of the school? How will the school treat my child as an individual?

These were questions asked by a number of parents. Issues such as the quality of education provided and the nature of the school environment clearly were important. Several parents commented that they had limited choice in terms of school, but this did not prevent them questioning what happened within the school and whether it was the type of educational environment they would prefer for their child. The location of the school, number of teachers and size of classes, whether the school had an orientation program for new children and the nature of supervision outside class time, were all issues raised by parents. Sometimes the school context was contrasted with the home or prior-to-school setting, where children experienced higher levels of supervision, smaller groups of children and higher staff:child ratios.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Summary

Like their children, parents have various expectations and concerns about the transition to school. Where teachers in schools value the input of parents and respect the role they play as educators of young children, these expectations and concerns will be regarded seriously and discussed openly.

What do educators say about starting school?

Social adjustment

Educators in school and prior-to-school settings were most concerned about children 'fitting' into their new environment. This involved fitting into the classroom context, and adjusting to being away from parents and family. Fitting into the classroom involved children being able to:

- follow directions
- take guidance from adults other than their parents
- operate as part of a large group
- do things independently and not require the teacher's constant attention
- adapt to changes in their routine, and
- know how to talk to teachers.

Educators in school and prior-to-school settings are concerned about children 'fitting' into their new environment

The interpersonal adjustment of the child involved being able to:

- separate easily from the parent, i.e. not crying or being upset for large parts of the day, and
- interact positively and cooperatively with other children.

Coupled with this was an awareness from educators of the difficulty faced by parents as they left their child at school for the first time.

Educators understood that transition was a time when parents were *upset, worried,* with some parents having *the ability to 'loosen the reins' more easily than others.*

Some educators in schools also recognised that they needed to make adjustments to the new children and families as they noted the importance of *establishing a positive relationship.* Others recognised the *amount of effort* required from them in the early days of the new school year, the *sense of exhaustion*, and the *need to be well prepared* for what sometimes looked like *organised chaos.*

Educators ... encourage children to assume responsibility for their own possessions and actions

Skills

While some children and parents mentioned the importance of children being able to do certain things, educators mentioned this more frequently. While maintaining their focus on children being able to manage as part of a large group, they also encouraged children to *assume responsibility for their own possessions and actions.* Therefore, children being able to *identify their own things, toilet themselves* and *dress themselves* assumed considerable importance. Other skills mentioned by educators in schools included children being able to *pay attention for a period of time, being able to cut out* and other fine motor skills.

The skills of parents were mentioned by educators in schools, as were their own skills in terms of helping children settle into the new environment and making the new environment accepting of the children.

Disposition

Not surprisingly, educators in schools were keen to teach children who were *excited and happy* about being there.

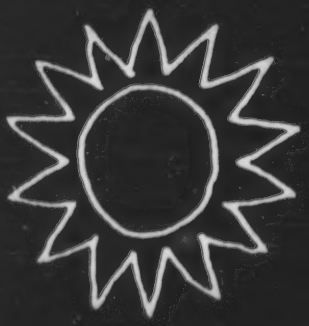
The dispositions of *friendliness, willingness to have a go* and *confidence in interactions* were also mentioned positively. The importance of family support and shared enthusiasm for school were emphasised by some educators. Others commented on their own disposition, noting that a desire and commitment to working with young children as they started school was important. Some educators were keen for other teachers in the school and the school executive to show greater acknowledgement of the importance of the first year of school and to have this reflected in school policy and practice.

Physical

Educators in both school and prior-to-school settings noted the tiredness of young children as they faced five full days of school each week. The need to build in rest periods was mentioned by some in response to this. Educators were more likely than children or parents to mention age as an important factor in children's transition to school. In NSW, where children whose birthday falls before July 31 can start school at the beginning of the year in which they turn five, some educators expressed a preference for children to be *older rather than younger* than five. Others noted that children could start school as soon as they were legally eligible, and that schools should adapt to suit the needs of younger children.

Educational environment

The differences between prior-to-school and home settings were emphasised by several educators. In particular, the expectation that children would work independently was seen as a major change for many children starting school. Educators in both settings talked about the importance of the school environment supporting the child, but also noted that children needed to adapt to the school. The aim of working with parents in partnership towards the education of the children was discussed often, and there was an emphasis on parents going to the school to seek information.



Educators on both sides for others [illegible] short and the academic [illegible] the importance of the first year of school

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Educators in schools recognised that this was not always possible for parents, and some schools had developed programs that incorporated alternatives. Overwhelmingly though, educators in schools felt that their role was to tell parents what was happening, rather than to involve parents in decisions about what might happen.

Summary

Educators in school and prior-to-school settings have a range of expectations about children starting school. For educators in schools, many of these relate to the task of managing a large group of children who are unfamiliar with the school environment as well as each other. Other expectations related to children wanting to be at school and being excited about the adventures and experiences awaiting them. Educators who mentioned these were conscious of their own role in making school a warm, welcoming and safe place to be and of their role in preparing for the new group of children they would be teaching. The idea that educators should choose to teach the first year of school was highlighted by some, who noted the commitment required and the likelihood that this would not be present if a teacher felt relegated to the situation.

Listening to children, parents and teachers

Each of the participants in the transition to school brings their own expectations and perspectives to the experience. Characteristics of effective transition programs include the recognition of these different expectations and perceptions as well as the willingness to listen to them. It is particularly important to listen to children, parents, and educators and to respond to their needs and interests as they face the significant changes associated with children starting school.

Effective transition programs are characterised by:

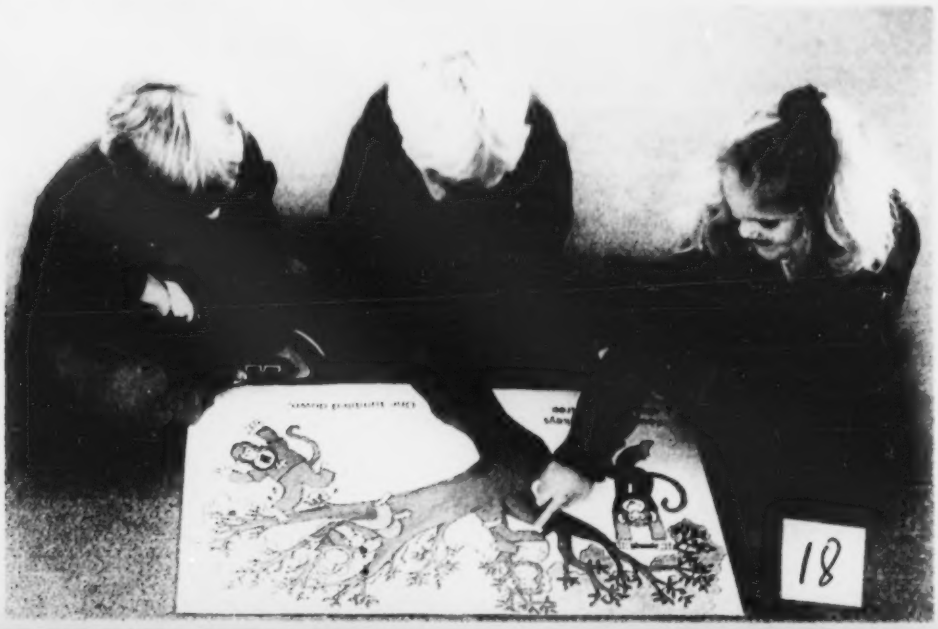
- *extensive planning in order to develop a program specific to a particular group of children, families, and community context;*

Educators in prior to school settings are concerned about children's ability to fit into school settings, as well as the willingness of those in schools to adjust to individual children and their families

- *recognition of the importance of each participant in the program;*
- *collaboration among children, families, school staff, including staff in prior-to-school settings;*
- *a sound early childhood philosophical base which incorporates a commitment to the diversity among children and families, school, and community contexts;*
- *ongoing interaction among the participants;*
- *input from the broader community in which the school and families exist, e.g. from playgroups, community health professionals, translators and interpreters, and, where appropriate, members of religious communities;*
- *involvement of staff from across the school, such as school liaison officers, teachers from other grades, school office staff, the canteen manager, librarian, community nurse, school aides, Aboriginal Education Assistants.*

Effective programs are not necessarily aimed at developing children's academic skills, although there may be some focus on specific areas. Rather, the prime focus is on establishing a sense of community among the participants, a sense of belonging, acceptance, and adventure as children, parents, and educators form a partnership to promote the education and wellbeing of young children.

Effective transition programs focus on establishing a sense of community among the participants, a sense of belonging, acceptance, and adventure



What matters for children, parents, &

It matters to ...

	Children	Parents	Educators
adjustment	that: • they know what happens at school • they have and make friends	that: • their children are accepted by teachers • their children have friends • their children 'fit' into the environment	that: • children can operate in a classroom • children can adapt socially to the school context
dispositions	• their feelings are accepted and responded to • they have fun at school	• their children want to be at school • the teacher likes their child	• the children want to be at school • they want to teach children in the first year of school
physical issues	• they feel safe	• their children's physical needs are met	• the children's physical needs are met • the children are older, rather than younger than the legal entry age

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

educators, & implications for practice

What can be done?

	Children	Parents	Educators
adjustment	can: • ask siblings, peers, parents and other adults about what happens at school • interact in positive and appropriate ways with peers	can: • find out themselves what happens at school and talk with children about this • make time to meet and get to know the teacher • provide a range of experiences outside the home where children are part of a larger group, e.g. visit the museum, attend a concert • provide opportunities for children to interact with other children at home and other out-of-school venues	can: • encourage children and families to visit the school and ask questions • explain things like the bell and what it means, rather than assuming that children know what it means • incorporate some familiar people and experiences into the daily program • group children with their friends and provide opportunities for the development of new friendships, e.g. small groups, play experiences • talk with parents about ways children are involved in class experiences, e.g. groups, as well as the curriculum and expectations • demonstrate acceptance of children and their families • respect the background and prior experiences children bring with them to school • value the diversity among children starting school and respond appropriately
dispositions	• share their feelings, as well as their experiences, with others • expect to be listened to	• talk about the feelings children experience as they start school • demonstrate their own positive attitude to children starting school • take time to get to know the teacher and establish a working relationship • recognise the impact of other significant adults in their child's life	• talk about the feelings children experience as they start school • accept that starting school can be a difficult time for parents as well as children • ensure that school is a welcoming and friendly place for children and families • get to know children and families • share the excitement of learning with young children through a relevant and meaningful curriculum • work with the school executive to emphasise the importance of the first year of school • take time to reflect upon what happens in the classroom and the role and impact of the teacher
physical issues	• be confident enough to talk about situations where they do or do not feel safe • recognise that they have the right to feel safe • recognise potential threats to their own safety and that of others, both physical (e.g. broken playground equipment) and psychological (e.g. teasing, bullying)	• help children recognise ways they can meet their needs, e.g. what to eat when, where to get a drink, where the toilets are • encourage children to try on their uniform before school starts • locate the people in the school who can help children with particular issues, e.g. canteen supervisor, office personnel • discuss strategies for identifying and moving out of situations which do not feel safe • respect children's feelings	• provide a smaller playground, supervised by familiar staff, for children starting school • be visible, especially in the first few days when friendly adult faces are important • ensure that the school is a safe place • help children develop some strategies to identify and leave situations that do not feel safe • respect children's feelings • provide some guidance about expectations for food and activities at lunch and recess • recognise children's varying needs throughout the day, eg some provision for a rest or sleep may be needed • examine the beliefs underlying age as a criterion for successful transition to school • recall the diversity among young children • help children work out the location of facilities or people they may need

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What matters for children, parents, &

It matters to ...

	Children	Parents	Educators
educational environment	that: • they are aware of the differences between prior-to-school and school settings	that: • there is an appropriate role for them in the school community • they are comfortable with the educational environment provided by the school	that: • the educational environment is appropriate • the school environment is supportive of the child and the family • there is positive and ongoing communication between home and school
rules	• they know the rules	• their children fit into the school environment	• the children can operate as part of a group • the children adapt to the school environment
skills		• children can toilet themselves and dress themselves	• the children assume responsibility for their actions and belongings • the children have fine motor skills, e.g. cutting, holding a pencil

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

educators, & implications for practice

What can be done?

	Children	Parents	Educators
educational environment	can: • recognise and discuss the differences they experience • consider why there may be differences • describe how they feel about the differences • visit school settings prior to starting school and prior-to-school settings once they have started school	can: • talk with children about the differences in settings and possible reasons for these • get to know the teacher as well as other parents and discuss possible roles within the school community • recognise that there are many ways to be involved in school communities • consider themselves partners in the education of their children • share their own expertise and knowledge of their children as is appropriate and as they feel comfortable • find out about the educational environment of the school before enrolling the children • continue to seek information about the educational environment and contribute to this whenever possible	can: • recognise that school and its expectations are unfamiliar for many children and families • regard parents as partners in their child's education • with parents, devise a range of roles, enabling them to select how and in what way they may be part of the school community • recognise and respond to the demands and constraints of working parents, parents who are in isolated areas distant from the school, and other parents who are unavailable during regular school hours • provide opportunities for parents to meet other members of the school community, including other parents • treat parents' concerns as legitimate • examine the planned curriculum and its relation to the children • ensure that the curriculum fits the children, rather than vice versa • plan for play • discuss curriculum, expectations and plan with parents • make sure the communication is two-way
rules	• discuss rules and possible reasons for these • consider situations where rules might be necessary • become a part of the school community and recognise the responsibilities that go with this, e.g. citizenship and respect for others, care of the environment • respect the rights and responsibilities of other members of the school community	• respect children's focus on rules, while at the same time encouraging a broader view of school experiences • talk about the ways rules are made and ways for changing rules • discuss times when rules do not apply	• discuss rules encountered in school and classroom contexts • respect children's focus on rules, while at the same time encouraging a broader view of school experiences • talk about the ways rules are made and ways for changing rules • discuss times when rules do not apply • consider ways of organising the classroom the encourage children to think through situations, rather than rely only on pre-determined rules • respect children as members of the school community
skills	• recognise their possessions • become aware of the effects of their actions • use materials such as scissors and pencils	• provide some clues to help children recognise what is theirs, e.g. symbol or sticker on their lunch box • provide opportunities for practice with fine motor skills, and some reasons and encouragement to engage in this	• be realistic about expectations and the reasons for these • share the expectations with parents and children • provide positive cues, e.g. reminders about hanging up jackets • give children opportunities to care for themselves and their belongings in a positive and accepting manner • accept that some time will be needed to collect or distribute things at some time during the day

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

References and suggested reading

Christensen, C. (1998) Managing children's transition to school: A case of multiple perspectives. Paper presented at the *OMEP XXII World Congress,* Copenhagen, August.

Davies, M. & North, J. (1990) Teacher's expectations of school entry skills. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 15* (4), 44–46.

Entwisle, D. R. (1995) The role of schools in sustaining early childhood program benefits. *The Future of Children, 5* (3), Winter.

Griffin, M. & Harvey, D. (1995) When do principals and teachers think children should start school? *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 20* (3), 27–32.

Hains, A. H., Fowler, S. A., Schwartz, I. S., Kottwitz, E. & Rosenkoetter, S. (1989) A comparison of preschool and kindergarten teacher expectations for school readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 4,* 75–88.

Kagan, S. L. (1993) Defining, assessing and implementing readiness: Challenges and opportunities. In Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland *The Fabric of Families: Weaving the Patterns,* Brisbane: C&K Association, pp. 61–81.

Margetts, K. (1997) Factors impacting on children's adjustment to the first year of primary school. *Early Childhood Folio, 3,* 53–56.

Perry, B., Dockett, S. & Howard, P. (In Press) Starting school: Issues for children, parents and teachers. Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education.

Perry, B., Dockett, S. & Tracey, D. (1998) At preschool they read to you, at school you learn to read. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 23* (4), 6–11.

Acknowledgement

This research was made possible through a University of Western Sydney, Macarthur Foundation Grant and Complementary Research Unit funding. As well, funds were contributed by the NSW Department of Education and Training. These financial contributions are gratefully acknowledged by the authors, as is the assistance of the consortium partners and the children, parents, and educators who have participated in the research. The opinions expressed are those of the authors.

Guidelines for Contributors

If you are interested in writing for the AECA Research in Practice Series or any other AECA publication, please contact the Publications Section of AECA for further information on the preparation of manuscripts and for a copy of the Guidelines for Contributors.

Publications Section
Australian Early Childhood Association
PO Box 105, Watson ACT 2602
Tel: (02) 6241 6900 Fax: (02) 6241 5547

Other Subscription Publications 1999

Every Child Magazine

Every Child magazine is published four times a year especially for early childhood educators, carers and parents of children from 0–8 years of age. It provides news and features of interest to everyone working with, and interested in, the education, care and development of young children.

Australian Journal of Early Childhood

This journal comes out four times per year. It features up to date articles designed to impart new information and encourage the critical exchange of ideas among practitioners in the early childhood field. AJEC gives the field an indispensable Australian perspective on issues of concern and interest.

Australian Early Childhood Newsletter

There will be four issues of the newsletter in 1999. The newsletter is produced by National Office staff and is a way of keeping the field informed of developments and issues as they occur. Particular attention is paid to political events and government policy changes, and it is likely that 1999 issues will continue this focus.

Bulk Rates are available for recreation orders [illegible] Contact AECA for details.

For subscription inquiries contact:

AECA Subscriptions
PO Box 105 Watson ACT 2602 Australia
Tel: (02) 6241 6900 Fax: (02) 6241 5547
Subscription toll free: 1800 [illegible] Email: [illegible]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

About AECA

The Australian Early Childhood Association Inc. (AECA) is a *leading specialist publisher of* early childhood literature. It actively promotes the provision of high quality services for all young children from 0–8 and their families, and supports the important role of parents. AECA is also the national umbrella organisation for Children's Services.

As well as producing the Australian Journal of Early Childhood, *Every Child* magazine, the AECA Research in Practice Series, a newsletter, and special titles, AECA markets books and videos on early childhood topics from other companies and organisations.

For further information please telephone (02) 6241 6900.

Other AECA publications include

Australian Journal of Early Childhood

Various special titles

Every Child magazine

Recent topics include.

- **Portfolios in action**
- **Numeracy and outcomes**
- **The toxic playground**
- **TV violence**
- **Supporting children with disabilities**

Other RIPS titles include

Delegation: Win-Win Strategies

Babies: Responding Appropriately

Young Children with Attention Difficulties

Understanding Separation and Divorce

Understanding Grief and Loss

Promoting Self-esteem

Health and Safety

Learning with Computers

Let's Tell Stories

Understanding Asthma

Organising Resources

Young Children with Additional Needs

AECA Research in Practice Series
Australian Early Childhood Association Inc.
PO Box 105, Watson ACT 2602
Tel:(02) 6241 6900 Fax:(02) 6241 5547
email: national@aeca.org.au

ISBN 1-875890-40-8

9 781875 890408

Vol. 6 No. 3 1999